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Denominating Augustine. The Controversial Reception of Augustine's Semiotics in Late Medieval and Early Protestant Scholasticism

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Abstract

Throughout the Middle Ages up to the 17th century, Augustine's conception of signs, as presented in *De doctrina christiana* II, was the common starting point of any semiotic discussion. Around 1600, however, the majority of Lutheran scholastics started, in open dispute with their denominational counterparts, the Calvinists, to explicitly reject the father's definition of a sign as 'a thing which, in addition to the impression it makes on the senses, also brings something else to mind'. This controversy was caused less by differing logical assumptions and was motivated more by contradicting theological convictions about Christ's presence in the Eucharist: To keep the basic (and likewise Augustinian) conception of the sacrament as a sign, the Lutherans, defending Christ's real presence in the sacrament, had to concede a sign to be self-referential, while the Calvinists, conceiving of the sacrament as a reminiscential symbol of Christ's passion, could hold on Augustine's definition of a sign as referring to something else. It was this sacramental debate that determined the value of Augustine's semiotic sayings, giving thus a denominational shape to a merely logical matter. The article aims to present this denominational reception of Augustine's semiotics, analysing its theological entanglements and tracing it back to the late medieval roots not only of the two conquering semiotic positions, but of their respective theological background as well.

To be in accordance with Augustine was, for centuries in the history of western Christianity, a major argument for the orthodoxy of a theologian.[1] Throughout the Middle Ages the bishop of Hippo was the most important doctrinal authority, guiding and confirming scholastics in their quest of theological truth and granting their congruence with tradition.[2] But also the Reformers and their

[1] A first draft of this paper was presented in 2011 at the 16th International Conference on Patristic Studies in Oxford. I wish to thank John Magee (Toronto) and Christoph Chalamet (Geneva) for their valuable comments on later elaborations of the text.

[2] For Augustine's omnipresent influence in the Middle Ages see Eric L. Saak, *Creating Augustine. Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012) and his 'Augustine in his Late Medieval Appropriations (1200-1500)', in Karla Pollmann (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford, 2013), 39-50, and the relevant chapters in Volker H. Drecoll (ed.), *Augustin-Handbuch* (Tübingen, 2007).

Studia Patristica LXXIV, 371-391.

followers, who in principle denied – as is well known – the value of traditional arguments, did not abandon the practice of emphatically referring to Augustine to prove the accordance of their teachings with his doctrine. More than a thousand citations of Augustine are present in Martin Luther's works,[3] and Calvin went as far as claiming the North-African bishop to be *totus noster* – completely ours – in order to strengthen his conformance with the Latin father.[4] The motives for this kind of backing are obvious: in proving their accordance with Augustine, the Reformers protected themselves against any polemics imputing their doctrine to be new, unheard, and foreign to Christianity. Hence, allusions to the Latin Christendom's most accepted father underscored, on the one hand, the Protestants' intention to re-form the church and to get back to an authentic understanding of the Bible, while on the other, it served to make a charge against doctrinal adversaries: to have Augustine on one's own side was an argument for the deviance of everybody else. And this, of course, was a strategic use of Augustine the Reformers adopted not only in their quarrels with the Roman Catholics, but also – and even more so – in inner-protestant disputes between the different denominational branches that were about to arise.[5]

It might thus surprise that there appears, in the early seventeenth century, in a seemingly marginal semiotic chapter of different Lutheran metaphysics, an explicit criticism of Augustine. The bone of contention was the Augustinian definition of a sign as it was presented in the opening paragraph of the second book *De doctrina christiana* or in Augustine's *De dialectica*, and which conceived of a sign as 'a thing which' – to use the words of *De doctrina christiana* – 'in addition to the impression it makes on the senses, also brings something else to mind.'[6] Sebastian Kirchmaier, an early seventeenth century Lutheran

[3] Besides the respective articles in the manuals cited above see the collection by Hans-Ulrich Delius, *Augustin als Quelle Luthers. Eine Materialsammlung* (Berlin, 1984), and for an old, but still valuable analysis, Adolf Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin* (Gütersloh, 1934). For a general overview on the use and diffusion of Augustine in the 16th century see Arnoud S.Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation. The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620* (Oxford, 2011).

[4] See J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, *Augustinus totus noster: das Augustinverständnis bei Johannes Calvin* (Göttingen, 1990) and Robert M. Kingdom, 'Augustine and Calvin', in Fanny LeMoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (eds), *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1994), 177-8. A still useful collection of material is provided by Luchesius Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'œuvre de Jean Calvin*, 2 vols. (Assen, 1956-1958).

[5] These two uses of Augustine were already present in Luther, see Albrecht Beutel, 'Luther', in *Augustin-Handbuch*, 615-22, 620; with regards also to the later developments see Irena Backus, 'The "Confessionaliziation" of Augustine in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation', in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (2013), 74-82.

[6] *De doctrina christiana* II 1.1, CChr.SL 32 (Turnhout, 1962), 32: *Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire*; see *De dialectica* V, ed. J. Pinborg (Dordrecht, 1975): *Signum est quod et se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit*. See Vincent Giraud, *Augustin, les signes et la manifestation* (Paris, 2013), 279.

theologian, stated in a disputation he held at the university of Wittenberg that those definitions were *inadaequatae nimis* – far too insufficient –, since, as he explained, they unnecessarily limited the signs to perceivable things.[7] Purely intelligible signs such as concepts or species could not match this definition so that, as Kirchmaier went on to explain, the recent doctors where right to expand the definition in a way that concepts were also included.[8] Heinrich Schmid, who taught some years after Kirchmaier at Wittenberg, accepted this type of argumentation and even claimed that he *optimo iure* – with every good right – rejected the Augustinian definitions as inadequate.[9]

This explicit criticism of Augustine is noteworthy in two respects. One concerns Augustine's definition itself. As is well known, compared to other semiotic approaches of the late Antiquity this definition included for the first time linguistic items into the notion of 'sign' which had been confined so far to indications.[10] Only the Augustinian definition allowed for the linguistic approach we are used to in modern semiotics; but even though this was, in late Antiquity, an enormous expansion of what could be treated as a sign, there was in fact no place in Augustine's definition, as our Lutheran authors stated, for anything like mental items. Quite obviously thus, the Lutherans had, compared to Augustine, a rather different and an even more expanded understanding of what a sign could be. But obviously as well, they nevertheless still felt the need to deal with Augustine's definition – if only to reject it. This is where their criticism gets noteworthy in a second respect: since, interestingly enough, Calvinist scholars of the same era continued to adhere to the Augustinian definitions, and they did so albeit fully aware of the difficulty of including concepts in these definitions.[11] Bartholomäus Keckermann, a Calvinist polymath, both in his logical and his metaphysical writings based his semiotics on Augustine,[12] and Clemens

[7] Sebastian Kirchmaier, *De signo et signato* (Wittenberg, 1664), fol. B2v: *Proinde inadaequatae nimis, angustiores quippe suo definito descriptiones Augustini erunt*.

[8] S. Kirchmaier, *De signo et signato* (1664), fol. B2r-v: *Nihilominus, quia et signa tantum intelligibilia, omnemque sensibilitatis rationem respuentia occurrunt, qualia sunt species sive noemata mentis, non immerito a recentioribus doctoribus vox ampliata fuit, ut et illa sub de\finitione signi comprehendi queant*.

[9] Heinrich Schmid, *De signo et signato* (Wittenberg, 1673), fol. A2rf: *Cum autem haec definitio solum signis instrumentalibus, nec omnibus accommodari | queat [...] optimo jure a nobis rejicitur ceu inadaequata*. Not a rejection, but an amplification of the Augustinian definition is proposed both by Christoph Scheibler, *Metaphysica divina* (Oxford, 1637 [Giessen 1617]), 1,417 and 421, and Abraham Calov, *Metaphysica* (Rostock, 1640), 727.

[10] Besides Tilman Borsche, 'Zeichentheorie im Übergang von den Stoikern zu Augustin', *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 19 (1994), 41-52 and Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens. Das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1997), 1-7; see in particular Philip Cary, *Outward Signs. The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford, 2008).

[11] A fact that has already been stated by S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 316-9.

[12] See the 'Systema Metaphysicum', in his *Systema Systematum* (Hanau, 1613), 2,1900b, and the 'Systema Logicum', ibid. 1,71a.

Timpler, one of the most influential Calvinist scholars of the early seventeenth century, while explicitly agreeing to the fact that the Augustinian definitions were too limited,[13] nevertheless maintained and even stressed that every sign – with the exception of concepts – had to be external and thus perceivable by senses. What Lutherans denied[14] was stressed by Calvinists.

To the modern reader, this controversy between Calvinist and Lutheran metaphysicians on the validity of a single Augustinian concept looks like a rather marginal problem that is not worthy of such violent debates. Of course, those Augustinian definitions of a sign were important: throughout the Middle Ages and also among the Catholic contemporaries of the protestant opponents, these Augustinian sayings were at the core of semiotic theories;[15] but throughout the Middle Ages – or at least ever since the fourteenth century[16] – the deficiency of these definitions regarding concepts was well-known without leading to any comparable controversies. Why thus did the Protestants raise that question, and why did the Lutherans even risk to explicitly confront a saying of Augustine? In what follows, I would like to determine the motives and the background of this inner-protestant debate by exploring its historical origins and its systematic scope. For this, it will be necessary to locate the discussion in the broader context of the reception of Augustine's semiotics not only in early modern, but rather in late medieval scholasticism. The first two sections of this article start thus with spots at the logical, but also at the theological reception of Augustinian semiotics, before, in a third step, a closer analysis will be given of the inner-protestant debate.

1. The Reception of Augustine's Semiotics in the Theology of Sacraments

It might not be obvious to start this survey of the afterlife of Augustine's semiotics with its reception in medieval theology. But Augustine's conception of what a sign is had one of its most important impacts during the Middle Ages in the theology of sacraments. While, in earliest Christianity, the term *sacramentum*

[13] Timpler's main criticism, though, was not the problem of intelligible signs, but the one of animal knowledge, see his *Metaphysicae systema* 3,4 (Hannover, 1612), 303: *Nam [definitiones Augustini] tantum competunt signo, quod homini aliquid significat; non vero signo, quod bestiae aliquid significat.*

[14] For further Lutheran testimonials that deny the perceptibility and exteriority of every sign without explicitly confronting Augustine see *e.g.* Johannes Scharff, *Metaphysica exemplaris* (Wittenberg, 1634), 2,229, Adam Spengler, *De signo et signato* (Berlin, 1649), fol. B4r, or Johannes Schultetus, *De signo et signato* (Wittenberg, 1659), fol. A3r-v.

[15] See, *e.g.*, the introducing question of the Conimbricenses' commentary to Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (*In Universam Dialecticam Aristotelis* [Coimbra, 1606], 2,5), or John of St. Thoma, *Tractatus de signis* 1,1, ed. John N. Deely (Berkeley, 1985), 116.

[16] See below, section 2.1.

was used as an equivalent to the Greek μυστήριον, it meant, from the third century on, not only the signified mystical things, but also the signifying things, the referrers, and hence the signs of a mystery.[17] And one of the first who consequently subsumed the sacramental rites under the notion of 'sign' was Augustine. He simply defined the sacraments as *sacrum signum*,[18] as a holy sign, a signifier whose signified was the mystical grace communicated by these signs. The parallels between sacramental rites and Augustine's general definition of a sign were obvious: there were the sacramental rites, perceivable by senses be it in their material part such as the baptismal water, or in their locutionary part such as the words pronounced by the priest; and there was the *aliud aliquid* they brought to mind, namely God's salutary action in man.

1.1 *Peter Lombard, his* sententiae*, and their interpretation*

The Latin west favorably received this Augustinian classification. In the twelfth century the treatment of the sacraments as a subcategory of signs was so common an approach to sacramental theology that a definition of the sacraments was usually done in explicit connection with the Augustinian definition of a sign.[19] Peter Lombard, whose *Sententiarum libri quatuor* would become the standard textbook of medieval scholastic theology, labeled the fourth book on the sacraments simply *de signis*, and he confronted in the very beginning of that book the Augustinian understanding of a sacrament with the Augustinian definition of a sign of the beginning chapters of *De doctrina christiana* II.1.[20]

However, since sacraments were signs, one had to ask not only about how they complied with the Augustinian definition, but also in what sacraments could be specified as a particular subclass of signs. Peter Lombard noted two distinctive properties of sacramental signs: first, sacraments are a subclass of the given signs, the *signa data*, or, to use a more common scholastic designation, they belong to the *signa ad placitum significantia*. Unlike smoke that – belonging to the other class of *signa naturalia* – naturally relates to the fire as its signified, sacraments and other *signa ad placita* are imposed signs which, in contrast to

[17] Günther Bornkamm, 'μυστήριον', *ThWNT* 4 (1942), 809-34, and Adolf Kolping, *Sacramentum Tertullianeum 1. Untersuchung über die Anfänge des christlichen Gebrauches der Vokabel sacramentum* (Münster, 1948).

[18] *De civitate Dei* X 5, CChr.SL 40 (Turnhout, 1955), 452, l. 19.

[19] For examples see Stéphane Gioanni, 'Un florilège augustinien sur la connaissance sacramentelle. Une source de Bérenger de Tours et d'Yves de Chartres?', in Monique Goullet (ed.), *Parva pro magnis mundera. Études de littérature tardo-antique et médiévale offertes à François Dolbeau par ses élèves* (Turnhout, 2009), 699-723; Damien van den Eynde, *Les définitions des sacrements pendant la première période de la théologie scolastique (1050-1240)* (Roma, 1950), 5; and, in particular, Peter Abaelard, *Sic et non*, ed. Ernestus Henke (Marburg, 1851), 309.

[20] Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, ed. Ignatius C. Brady (Grottaferrata, 1971-1981), 2,231.

natural signs, have no intrinsic relation to the things they signify.[21] The second distinctive property Peter Lombard mentioned, was the similarity a sacrament was said to have with the thing it signified: even though there was no natural relation between a sacramental sign and its signified, there was, according to Peter Lombard, a relation of similitude – such as the baptismal water that was seen as an image of the spiritual ablution of sins.[22] These distinctions finally led Lombard to his own definition of a sacrament as 'so great a sign of the grace of God and the form of invisible grace, that it bears its image and exists as its cause.'[23]

Yet, with the last words of that definition, Peter Lombard not only resumed what he had found so far as the distinctive properties of a sacrament, but he implicitly introduced a third property: sacraments were not only given signs of grace that bore a similarity of its effect, but they were also the cause of this effect. When, in the thirteenth century, Peter Lombard's four books of *Sentences* became the base text of theological instruction at the recently founded universities, it was primarily this third aspect that was seen to be in need of explanation. Late medieval theology of sacraments in general conceived of the problem as the question of knowing whether these sacramental signs could have themselves an effect to the communication of grace and function as its real causes, or whether they were just signifying acts on whose application God alone communicated the sacramental grace.[24] On that question, the scholastics were split into two groups. While Thomas Aquinas and his followers argued for a cooperation of the sacraments and introduced the notion of instrumental causality, a causality which did not cause the grace itself, but a preliminary disposition to its acceptance such as the baptismal character, Bonaventura, Scotus, and in their following the Scotists and the Nominalists denied any active involvement of the sacraments, claiming that God alone by virtue of a pact he had made with the church every time produced the grace when a sacrament was administered.[25]

[21] Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* IV 1.4, ed. I. Brady (1981), 2,233: *Signorum vero alia sunt naturalia, ut fumus significans ignem; alia data; et eorum quae data sunt, quaedam sunt Sacramenta, quaedam non*. See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* II 1.2, CChr.SL 32, 32-3.

[22] Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* IV 1.4, ed. I. Brady (1981), 2,233: *Sacramentum eius rei similitudinem gerit, cuius signum est. Si enim Sacramenta non haberent similitudinem rerum, quarum Sacramenta sunt, proprie Sacramenta non dicerentur*. See Augustine, *Epistula* 98.9, CChr.SL 31A (Turnhout, 2005), 233.

[23] Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* IV 1.4, ed. I. Brady (1981) 2,233: *Sacramentum enim proprie dicitur quod ita signum est gratiae Dei et invisibilis gratiae forma, ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat*. See Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace. Signe, rituel, sacré* (Paris, 2004), 96-8.

[24] *E.g.* Peter Auriol, *In quartum librum sententiarum* d.1, q.1 (Roma, 1605), fol. 9a: *Utrum in Sacramentis novae legis […] oporteat ponere virtutem influxam Sacramentis formaliter inhaerentem, quae sit causa gratiae in anima nostra effective, ita quod Deus mediantibus Sacramentis virtute eis infusa, dicatur gratiam in anima creare*.

[25] For recent literature on this debate see I. Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace* (2004), and Ueli Zahnd, *Wirksame Zeichen? Sakramentenlehre und Semiotik in der Scholastik des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Tübingen, 2014).

The Augustinian definition of a sign was in the background of that debate insofar as it was not clear whether its last part, the *aliud faciens in cogitationem venire*, was to be understood as an act of causation or not. Was the sign in its action of bringing something to mind a real cause of that something brought to mind? The Thomists, of course, would affirm this. As evidence for his doctrine of instrumental causality, Thomas Aquinas himself relied on the example of a teachers' audible speech, a *sermo audibilis*, which was said to be a cause of learning[26] since it contained in some way the *intentiones animae*, the concepts the verbal signs were able to evoke.[27] Scotus, however, took the opposite stand. For him, it was manifestly false to suppose that an audible speech would formally contain the concepts it signifies: there is senseless speech which does not signify anything,[28] and there are in different languages different words for the same thing, which I all would be able to understand if all these words would cause by themselves the concept of the signified thing.[29] Hence, the *aliud* a sign brings to mind, could not be caused by the sign itself, rather for Scotus its concept was formerly caused by apprehension of the signified thing. Only then and since the sign and the concept were related to the same thing, the intellect was capable of linking a perceived word with its respective concept, and so to understand what had been said.[30]

[26] See the *Auctoritates Aristotelis,* VII.5, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse (Louvain, 1974), 196: *Sermo audibilis existens ex causa disciplinae non per se, sed per accidens, id est in quantum, significat aliquid.*

[27] Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super sententiis* IV d.1, q.1, a.4, qc.2, ad 4, ed. Maria F. Moos (Paris, 1947), 35-6: *In re corporali non potest esse virtus spiritualis secundum esse completum; potest tamen ibi esse per modum intentionis, sicut in instrumentis motis ab artifice est virtus artis, et sermo audibilis existens causa disciplinae, ut dicitur in Libro de sensu et sensato continet intentiones animae quodammodo.*

[28] Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV d.1, p.3, q.1-2, n.302, ed. Vaticana (Roma, 2008), 107: *Exempla, quae adducta sunt de virtute recepta in instrumento, non concludunt. Primum, de sensibili sermone, accipit manifeste falsum, nam sermo audibilis non habet in se formaliter aliquam intentionem animae. Quod probatur, quia sermo non impositus ad significandum, nullam talem formam habet in se (hoc patet omnibus); per impositionem autem non recipit aliquam formam absolutam, nec relationem nisi forte rationis.*

[29] *Ibid.: Hoc etiam probatur aliter, quia eodem existente agente principali et instrumento sufficiente, sequitur eadem actio; sed si latinus proferat verba latina graeco, idem est agens principale (et instrumentum, quod esset si loqueretur alii latino), tamen non sequitur effectus, quia nullus conceptus causatur in graeco audiente; ergo ille sermo non erat instrumentum ex se ad causandum conceptum animae in audiente.*

[30] *Ibid.* n.303, 107-8: *Sermo audibilis est signum rememorativum respectu conceptus, ita quod facta immutatione sensus ab ipso sermone, et ulterius intellecta natura eius in quantum talis natura est, intellectus cognoscens ipsum esse impositum ad significandum talem naturam, ex collatione eius ad illud aliud intelligit illud aliud non ita quod sermo per aliquam formam causat conceptum de aliqua re, sed conceptus est praevius ad conceptum de re quae causatur per propriam speciem rei vel phantasma in anima.*

1.2 *Linguistic parallels*

Based on the Augustinian understanding of the sacraments as signs, both Thomas and Scotus were led to discuss a number of rather linguistic questions within their sacramental theology and to give evidence of differing models of how language works. But since the Augustinian wording of *faciens in cogitationem venire* was reconcilable with both positions, their discussions resulted in a different understanding, indeed, but not in a criticism of Augustine – at least not in view of this last part of his definition. In view of the definition's restriction to perceivable things, however, Augustine's wording got problematic. Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, explicitly devoted a whole *quaestiuncula* to the problem of knowing whether the Augustinian definition of a sign was well done or not.[31] Amongst the three arguments against the validity of the definition, two faced its restriction on perceivable things. One was based on the premise that every effect can be said to be a sign of its cause – but since there are spiritual effects which obviously are not perceivable by senses, not every sign can be said to be sensible.[32] The other rested upon the premise that every interlocution is based on signs – yet angels communicate without having any senses, so again not every sign can be said to be sensible.[33] However, it is not so much these present arguments and their refutation which are interesting for the present purpose (in both cases, Thomas showed that the arguments were based on false premises[34]). Much more interesting is the fact that, although the treatment of causes as signs can already be seen as an expansion of the scope of Augustine's definition, one prominent argument against it was still missing, namely the one initially cited with the Lutheran theologians who confronted the Augustinian definition with purely mental signs. Apparently, this kind of argumentation did not matter for Thomas Aquinas' understanding of a sign. Without losing a word on concepts he rather could continue, by rejecting the alleged arguments, to explicitly defend the Augustinian restriction of signs to sensible things.[35]

[31] Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum* IV d.1, q.1, a.1, qc.2, ed. F. Moos (1947), 9-10, 13-4.

[32] *Ibid*., arg.2, ed. F. Moos (1947), 10: *Secundum philosophum in libro priorum, omnis effectus suae causae signum esse potest. Sed quidam effectus sunt spirituales, qui nullam speciem ingerunt sensibus. Ergo non omne signum aliquam speciem sensibus ingerit*. On this argument, see already Richard Fishacre, *In quartum librum sententiarum* d.1, p.1, q.3, arg.1, ed. prov. Joseph Goering, 24.

[33] *Ibid*., arg.3: *Omnis locutio fit per aliqua signa. Sed Angeli loquuntur non prolato aliquo sensibili sermone, ut in II lib. d. 11 dictum est. Ergo non omne signum est sensibile*. See Fishacre, *In quartum* d.1, p.1, q.3, arg.1, ed. prov. J. Goering 24.

[34] *Ibid*., ed. F. Moos (1947), 14.

[35] *Ibid*., ed. F. Moos (1947), 13: *ideo signum quantum ad primam sui institutionem significat aliquam rem sensibilem, prout per eam manuducimur in cognitionem alicujus occulti*. See also his *Quaestiones de potentia* q.6, a.10, arg.6, ed. Paul M. Pession (Turin, 1949), 54.

1.3 *Scotus' expansion of the definition's scope*

In Scotus, however, matters are slightly different. There is only one place in his commentary on the fourth book of Lombard's *Sentences* where he explicitly refers to Augustine's definition of a sign, and this is in distinction six where he discusses the question whether or not the character impressed in baptism is an absolute form of the baptised human.[36] As already mentioned, this character had a rather important function in the sacramental model of Thomas Aquinas, since it was this character which was the intrinsic effect of the baptismal sacrament itself: it was in effecting this character that, for Thomas, the sacrament of baptism could be understood as an instrumental cause.[37] Scotus, however, whose model of sacramental efficiency denied any intrinsic causality of the sacraments, was reserved in accepting the impression of such a character,[38] and Scotus certainly did not conceive of it as an absolute form. Now, Thomas had argued for this formally absolute character by its being a sign, a lasting sign namely of the baptismal act.[39] But since, for Thomas, a relation could not be the base of another relation – for him, this would lead to an infinite regress – and since signification was a kind of relation, it was obvious for Thomas that the signifying character could not be itself a relational entity.[40]

Scotus responded by denying Thomas' premise. For Scotus, it was well possible that a relational entity was itself the fundament of yet another relation such as the cognition of an earlier and a later,[41] and it was in view of this argument that Scotus suddenly was led to expand the scope of the Augustinian definition of a sign: 'When', Scotus wrote, 'according to Augustine a sign is a thing which in addition to the impression it makes on the senses, also brings something else to mind, which is', Scotus adds, 'true not only of sensible signs, where "sense" is strictly understood as corporeal sense, but also of an incorporeal sense, when "sense" is generally understood as cognitive faculty, then I say, that there is nothing from whose cognition one could not get into the

[36] Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV d.6, p.4, a.2, q.2, n.302, ed. Vaticana (2008), 388.

[37] Thomas, *Scriptum* IV d.1, q.1, a.4, qc.5, n.127, ed. F. Moos (1947), 32.

[38] Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV d.6, p.4, a.2, q.1, n.246, ed. Vaticana (2008), 370: *Propter igitur solam auctoritatem Ecclesiae – quantum occurrit ad praesens – est ponendum characterem imprimi.*

[39] Thomas, *Scriptum* IV d.4, q.1, a.1, qc.1, ed. F. Moos (1947), 149: *Signum per formam quam sensibus vel intellectui imprimit, facit aliquid in cognitionem venire. Similiter etiam nihil distinguitur ab alio nisi per aliquam formam. Similitudo etiam est relatio super unitate qualitatis fundata, ut dicitur in V Meta. Unde patet quod quaelibet illarum relationum quam importat character, requirit aliquam formam substratam; et cum non sit forma substantialis, quia forma substantialis in sacramentis non datur, relinquitur quod forma substrata sit qualitas quaedam, cujus unitas consignificationis similitudinem facit.*

[40] *Ibid.* 150: *Cum ergo character ordinetur ad aliquid simpliciter* [...] *non potest esse quod qualitas supra quam fundatur relatio characteris sit habitus, sed magis potentia.*

[41] Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV d.6, p.4, a.2, q.2, n.302, ed. Vaticana (2008), 388: *Nihil est ex cuius cognitione non possit devenire in cognitionem alterius, saltem ut ex cognitione posterioris in prius, quin illud posterius possit dici signum.*

cognition of something else.'[42] In other words, a cognition could refer to another cognition, a relation could be the base of another relation, hence, concepts could be treated as signs.

Whereas Thomas Aquinas defended the restriction of Augustine's definition on sensible things and, in doing so, not even thought about clarifying the status of concepts within this semiotic discussion, Scotus was led to expand the Augustinian definition from sensible things to anything affecting the *potentia cognitiva*. The two models of sacramental efficacy Thomas and Scotus were working with seem thus not only to have been related with two different models of how language works, but much more basically with two different models of what a sign is. But in order to better understand this difference, we have to turn from sacramental theology to the reception of the Augustinian semiotics in late medieval *logic*.

2. The Augustinian definition in late medieval logic

There is one main reason for treating the reception of Augustine's semiotics in medieval logic only in the second place after its reception in theology: The main source for semiotics in medieval *logic* was not Augustine, but Boethius' translation and commentary of Aristotle's *Perihermeneias*. In the starting chapter of that book, Aristotle wrote about the relation between things, words, scripture and the *passiones animae*, the concepts those entities were able to evoke in a human's mind.[43] For our present purposes, this description matters insofar as Boethius interpreted both the relation between a written entity and a spoken word, and the one between a spoken word and a concept as a relation of signification, whereas he described, in accordance with Aristotle, the relation between a concept and a thing as one of similarity.[44]

Two points are of special interest in view of the later developments: First and in opposition to the Augustinian approach, this Aristotelian presentation

[42] *Ibid.*: *Si 'signum est – secundum Augustinum* De doctrina christiana – *quod praeter notitiam, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud in cognitionem venire facit' (quod verum est non solum de signo sensibili, accipiendo 'sensum' stricte pro sensu corporali, sed verum est etiam accipiendo sensum generaliter pro potentia cognitiva), – accipiendo igitur 'sensum' aliter pro potentia cognitiva, sic dico quod nihil est ex cuius cognitione non possit devenire in cognitionem alterius.*

[43] Boethius, *De interpretatione* I.1, ed. Carolus Meiser (Leipzig, 1880), 3: *Sunt ergo ea quae sunt in voce earum quae sunt in anima passionum notae et ea quae scribuntur eorum quae sunt in voce. Et quemadmodum nec litterae omnibus eaedem, sic nec voces eaedem. Quorum autem haec primorum notae, eaedem omnibus passiones animae et quorum hae similitudines, res etiam eaedem.*

[44] *Ibid.* 37: *Cum igitur haec sint quattuor: res, intellectus, vox, littera, rem concipit intellectus, intellectum vero voces designant, ipsa vero voces litterae significant. Intellectus vero animae quaedam passio est. Nisi enim quandam similitudinem rei quam quis intellegit in animae ratione patiatur nullus est intellectus.*

was rather epistemological than linguistic.[45] The ordering of these entities – scripture, words, concepts, and things – was inspired by theories of perception rather than by thoughts on intersubjective communication. Nevertheless, there is no explicit discord between the two approaches, and this is the second point of interest: in stating a difference between the concept-thing-relation and the other two relations (word-concept and scripture-word), the *passiones animae* kept a special state: they were *similitudines*, not signs, and hence they did not challenge the Augustinian restriction of signs to sensible things at all. So, when Thomas Aquinas in his questioning of the Augustinian definition did not argue with the *passiones animae*, he presented himself as a close follower not only of Augustine, but also of the Boethian tradition.

2.1 *Concepts as signs*

Interestingly enough, however, in the middle of the thirteenth century medieval logicians started to think of concepts as signs. Even though it complied neither with the Augustinian nor with the Boethian approach, there was an increasing number especially among English scholars who considered the relation between the *passiones animae* and the things as one of signification.[46] The reasons for this change in the understanding of the *passiones animae* are not very clear. This might have been predisposed in Boethius' text itself, where it was a rather small step to expand the analogy in the relation between writings and words and between words and concepts to the one between concepts and things.[47] What is more, this new understanding of concepts might depend on reflections on syncathegorematical terms which were conceived to function as a kind of signs of second degree;[48] and it might depend on an epistemological interpretation of the Aristotelian premise already present in Thomas Aquinas, namely that every effect can be considered as a sign of its cause – and concepts in an epistemological sense were affected by the perceived things.[49] It might, more

[45] On this difference see the fundamental article by Alfonso Maierù, '*Signum* dans la culture médiévale', in Jan P. Beckmann (ed.), *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1981), 51-72; on the epistemological bias of the Boethian approach see John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind* (Leiden a.o., 1989), 56-7, and Taki Suto, *Boethius on Mind, Grammar and Logic. A Study of Boethius' Commentaries on* Peri hermeneias (Leiden a.o., 2012), 65-6.

[46] On this fundamental change see S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 77-113.

[47] Jan Pinborg, 'Roger Bacon on Signs. A newly recovered part of the Opus Maius', in J. P. Beckmann (ed.), *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter* (1981), 403-12, 407, and Earline J. Ashworth, 'The Doctrine of Signs in some Early Sixteenth-Century Spanish Logicians', in Ignacio Angelelli and Angel d'Ors (eds), *Estudios de historia de la logica. Actas del II simposio de historia de la logica, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, 25-27 de mayo de 1987* (Pamplona, 1990), 13-38, 24.

[48] S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 77.

[49] See Richard Fishacre, *In quartum* d.1, p.1, q.3, arg.5, ed. prov. J. Goering, 24: *Item, cum intelligibilia et sensibilia possunt esse significata, et intelligibilia et sensibilia possunt esse signa,*

interestingly in view of Augustine, depend on the latter's statements of an inner, mental discourse which allowed for a linguistic approach to concepts.[50] Most probably, however, and most interesting for the present purposes, this new understanding of the concepts might also have been inspired by sacramental theology. Already two generations before Scotus, Richard Fishacre, a theologian working at Oxford in the middle of the thirteenth century, was led to conclude in his discussion of our well-known baptismal character that there obviously were some signs, like this character, that were not sensible at all.[51]

Whatever amalgam of these probable reasons might have resulted in this new understanding of a concept, its effects were rather distinct: while this new conception was easily reconcilable with the Boethian idea of similarity, the Augustinian definition with its restriction on sensible things got problematic. It was still in the thirteenth century that some logicians became aware of the deficiency of the Augustinian wording and started to question its validity as a universal definition of what a sign is. Roger Bacon, in his *De signis* explicitly stated that not every sign was brought to the senses, as the *vulgata descriptio signi* supposed;[52] and Pseudo-Kilwardby noted that this definition was not universally true of every sign, since the *passiones animi* were signs as well.[53]

Through the different lines of tradition in logic and sacramental theology, and in confrontation with the Boethian epistemological approach, the Augustinian definition of a sign was thus seriously challenged. There is however one striking thing: while these logicians – as well as Scotus in his sacramental theology – restricted the definition's validity or expanded it to their new needs, they continued to include Augustine's approach in at least parts of their semiotics and did not generally reject it in a way comparable to what our initially mentioned Lutheran authors would do. And this is true not only for these authors of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, but for late medieval logic in general.

quia in utroque genere sunt causae et causata, et causata sunt signa causarum, quid est quod hac definitione signi dicitur tantum sensibilia esse signa et tantum intelligibilia esse significata?

[50] See S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 78 n. 153. On this inner, mental discourse of the soul see V. Giraud, *Augustin* (2013), 185-95.

[51] Richard Fishacre, *In quartum* d.1, p.1, ad q.3, ed. prov. J. Goering 28: *Fateor aliqua signa sunt tantum intelligibilia, et speciem nullam ingerunt sensibus, sicut dictae rationes probant. Unde haec non est universalis definitio signorum, sed eorum quae propriissime, et magis communiter, et magis utiliter sunt signa*. On this, see Irène Rosier, *La parole comme acte. Sur la grammaire et la sémantique au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1994), 114.

[52] See 'An Unedited Part of Roger Bacon's "Opus maius" : "De signis"', ed. K.M. Fredborg, L. Nielsen and J. Pinborg, *Traditio* 34 (1978), 75-136, 82: A sign is *illud quod oblatum sensui vel intellectui aliquid designat ipsi intellectui, quoniam non omne signum offertur sensui ut vulgata descriptio signi supponit, sed aliquod soli intellectui offertur* .

[53] K.M. Fredborg *et al*., 'The Commentary on "Priscianus Maior" ascribed to Robert Kilwardby', *CIMAGL* 15 (1975), 1-143, 4: *Potest etiam dici quod ista definitio non est universaliter vera de quolibet signo quia passiones animi sunt signa rerum et tamen non ingerunt speciem suam sensibus*.

While an understanding of concepts as signs was indeed widely accepted in as late as the middle of the fourteenth century, the Augustinian definition nevertheless continued to be received.

A short look at the further development of semiotics in late medieval logic may confirm this. As is well known, the emergence of Nominalism in the fourteenth century had a huge impact into late medieval scholasticism in general and resulted in the famous *Wegestreit* that split the German universities into two main *viae*, two ways of doing philosophy.[54] Basically, the debate between those *viae* was about some fundamental presuppositions on how much philosophy could be a means of doing theology; but in some sense, it depended as well on this new understanding of concepts as signs: no one was as consequent in applying this new understanding as William of Ockham, and his famous conception of universals as particular signs that were able to designate multiple things was intrinsically linked with that new semiotic approach to concepts.[55] Apparently, even though the understanding of concepts as signs was generally accepted from the fourteenth century on, it was still disputable to what extent this was to be implemented in logic and whether the Boethian understanding of concepts as similarities was still a demarcating feature of these conceptual signs. Unsurprisingly thus, the positions that resulted in the different *viae* of the fifteenth century differed in particular logical problems, too, and had notably an effect on some semiotic problems. For the present purposes, it will be sufficient to mention two of them.

2.2 *A sign's significational force*

A first semiotic problem concerns the question where a given sign, a *signum ad placitum significans*, had its significational force from. As already mentioned, this kind of signs was thought to have been *imposed* to signify, and it is easily discernible what inspired – in the Christian Middle Ages – such a concept of imposition: it is the story of Adam walking through the garden of Eden and giving the things their names.[56] The label, however, that was commonly attached to this class of sings – to signify *ad placitum*, by convenience – suggested a

[54] See Maarten J. Hoenen, 'Via Antiqua and Via Moderna in the Fifteenth Century. Doctrinal, Institutional, and Church Political Factors in the Wegestreit', in Russel L. Friedman and Lauge O. Nielsen (eds), *The Medieval Heritage in early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400-1700* (Dordrecht, 2003), 9-26, and *id.* 'Nominalismus als universitäre Spekulationskontrolle', *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 73 (2006), 349-74.

[55] William of Ockham, *Summa logicae* I.14, ed. Philotheus Boehner (St. Bonaventure NY, 1957), 49; see Claude Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts* (Aldershot, 2004), 45: 'That concepts should be signs, therefore, is a crucial requirement of Ockham's nominalism.'

[56] See Gilbert Dahan, 'Nommer les êtres. Exégèse et théories du langage dans les commentaires médiévaux de Genèse 2,19-20', in Steve Ebbesen (ed.), *Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1995), 55-74.

rather different conception, namely the one of a community of speakers that simply agreed to use a word in this or that manner. Accordingly, there were two main positions in late medieval semiotics. On the one side, a Scotist like Peter of Tartaret or a Nominalist like John Mair who both were working in Paris at the turn of the 16th century, conceived of the *signum ad placitum* as one that represented its *significatum* by its voluntary use, and that signified thus by mere convenience.[57]

For the Thomists, on the other side, this conception of a voluntary or even arbitrary use of signs appears to have been opposed to their basic understanding of language.[58] John Versor, a Parisian master from the middle of the 15th century who was particularly used by the Thomists in Cologne,[59] explained where it would lead to if the signification of a word was exposed to anybody's willing: the word's 'signification would be infinitely variable and, as a consequence, there would be no certain knowledge of its signification.'[60] The notion of *ad placitum* was thus only to be attributed to the *placet* of a word's first *impositor*. It is his authority, that guarantees in the Thomistic understanding the reliable signification of a word, and it is due to this first *impositor* – and not to interlocutionary convenience – that words have a significational force:

> It includes two things to be a voice that signifies: the first is material and it is the voice itself. The second is formal and is the force to signify and to actually represent its signified. This force has been conveyed to the voice by its institution and its assignment to signify. And this force [...] is given to it through the imposition by its first *impositor*, who assigns the voice to one signified and not to the other.[61]

[57] Petrus Tartaretus, *Expositio in summulas Petri Hispani iuxta mentem Scoti* I.3 (Basel, 1514), fol. 3va: *Significare ad placitum est ex impositione vel usu voluntario repraesentare suum significatum*; and John Mair, *Termini* (Paris, 1502), fol B3rb: *Significare ad placitum est ex impositione vel usu representare. Aliqui termini ex sola consuetudine sua significata important.*

[58] Magnus Hundt, a rather late Thomist commentator of Peter of Spain from Leipzig, explains why *ad placitum* is not a synonym of *ad voluntatem*: *Dicitur vox significativa ad placitum et non vox significativa ad voluntatem quia impositio vocis fit ab extra, quia a proprietatibus rei, et terminatur ad intra. Sed ad placitum est actus voluntatis qui incipit ab extra et terminatur ab intra. Voluntas autem incipit ab intra et terminatur ab extra. Ergo dicitur vox significativa ad placitum et non ad voluntatem* (*Compendium totius logicae* [Leipzig, 1501], fol. D2v).

[59] Versor's position in the Wegestreit is not as clear as his reception by the Cologne Thomists might suggest, see Pepijn Rutten, '"Secundum processum et mentem Versoris". John Versor and His Relation to the Schools of Thought Reconsidered', *Vivarium* 43 (2005), 292-329.

[60] John Versor, *Super septem tractatus Petri Hispani* (Nürnberg, 1495), fol. a8r: *Si vox significaret ad placitum, suam significatio erit variabilis in infinitum et per consequens nulla est certa cognitio de significatione vocis significative.* [...] *Dicendum quod illud quod sit ad placitum cuiuslibet variatur in infinitum, non tamen illud quod sit determinate ad placitum unius sicut est vox significativa quae significat solum ad placitum primi instituentis.*

[61] *Ibid.* fol. a6v: *Vox significativa duo includit. Primum est materiale quod est ipsa vox. Secundum est formale quod est ipsa virtus significandi et representandi actualiter suum significatum. Que virtus sibi convenit per institutionem et ordinationem ad significandum.* [...] *Et datur ipsi voci quandoque per impositionem primi imponentis qui ordinat vocem ad unum significatum et non aliud; quandoque pervenit per ordinationem quae fit ab instinctu nature qui inclinat animalia ad*

The parallels between these two different models of the origin of the significational force of a word and the two models of sacramental efficacy are obvious: where, on the one hand, the Thomists thought of sacramental and linguistic signs as entities that, after their imposition, once and for all intrinsically and somehow formally bore the force to cause their effect (be it to signify or be it to instrumentally cooperate in the administration of grace), both the Scotists and the Nominalists thought, on the other hand, of the production of signification as well as of the sacramental communication of grace as the effect of a mere semiotic convention. Just as in sacramental theology, the Augustinian indetermination on a sign's functioning, *i.e.* on how it was to be understood that a sign 'brings something to mind', led in late medieval semiotics, too, to two competing models.

2.3 *Self-referentiality*

But there was, besides this functional aspect (and besides the restriction of signs to sensible things) yet a third aspect in Augustine's definition that, in late medieval logic, got problematic. In the wording of Augustine's definition a sign was a thing that also brings *aliud aliquid* to mind – something else than itself. Late medieval logic discussed this condition as the question of knowing whether a sign could signify itself or not. Our Scotist, Peter Tartaret, explicitly rejected the possibility of a sign's self-referentiality since otherwise, he argued, it would be impossible to distinguish between a signifying and a non-signifying sound, between words and simple noises.[62] Others however, and interestingly both the followers of the *via* of Thomas Aquinas and the Nominalists, insisted in the contrary and claimed the possibility of a sign to be a sign of itself. Peter of Ailly, counted among the Nominalists and very influential in the fifteenth century, defined the natural signification in its most proper sense as 'representing something to the cognitive faculty by itself and not by means of something else […], and this is how we say that a concept which is naturally a similarity of a certain thing, properly represents this thing.'[63] Apparently, the understanding of concepts

formandum voces suas effectus representantes. Ex quo patet quod ad vocem significativam primo requiritur quod habeat significatum eius cuius ipsa est signum. Secundo requiritur quod habeat ordinationem ad talem significatum vel secundum placitum imponentis vel secundum instinctum nature.

[62] Petrus Tartaretus, *Expositio*, fol. 3va: *Ad hoc quod vox sit significativa requiritur quod significet aliquid aliud a se, quia si non, tunc omnis vox esset significativa cum omnis vox significet se. Requiritur etiam quod significet aliud a prolatore, quia non sic significat suum prolatorem nisi suppleta illa vox esset imposita ad significandum suum prolatorem. Requiritur etiam quod significet aliud a sibi simili vel aliqua vel aliqualiter. Sequitur ex hoc diffinitio vocis non significative – puta quod vox non significativa est quae non est nata significare aliquid aliud a se vel sibi simili vel suo prolatore vel aliqua vel aliqualiter.*

[63] Peter of Ailly, *Conceptus*, ed. Ludger Kacmareck, in *Modi significandi und ihre Destruktionen* (Münster, 1980), 81-101, 88: *Significare naturaliter proprie est aliquid se ipso et non mediante alio*

as signs came into conflict not only with the restriction to sensible things, but also with this 'something-else'-stipulation; and this was obviously due to the conjunction of the semiotic understanding of concepts with the Boethian understanding of concepts as similarities: if similarity is the fundament of a semiotic relation, then the sign's most proper signified is this similar property which is not only in the signified thing, but in the similar sign as well. And hence, because of this similar property, the sign is a sign of itself. Now, in concepts, when regarded as signs, signifier and signified were not only similar, but identical – the sign thus even coincided with its signified, and there was nothing left for an *aliud aliquid*.[64]

Yet, this Boethian conception of similarity was even more present in the Thomistic approach, and that, again, was due to their epistemology: in their theory of perception, Thomists usually postulated the existence of *species*, these kinds of mental representations that were abstracted in the *phantasia* from the sensual impression; and they conceived of those *species* as the sensual impression's similarities.[65] Hence, while Nominalists had to accept a self-referentiality in concepts as the proper natural signs, someone like John Versor could claim that any sound and any sign – communicating through the senses its similarity to the *phantasia* – was first and foremost a sign of itself: even meaningless sounds without any proper signification were considered to be signs, namely signs of themselves.[66] This is exactly the conclusion the Scotist Peter Tartaret had tried to preclude, and, indeed, in his own definition of a sign, Tartaret explicitly demanded that a sign, in order to be a sign, had to signify something *aliud a sibi simili*, something else than what was similar to the sign itself.[67]

As a result, in late medieval logic two inverse developments become apparent in the interpretation of the Boethian ordering of scripture, words, *passiones animae* and things: while, on the one hand, Nominalist and Scotist authors started to translate the semiotic character of the relation between the first three entities into the relation between *passiones animae* and things, Thomists translated the similarity-relation between these last two entities into the relation between words and concepts. This fits, once again, with the two linguistic and sacramental models supported by these schools of thought: just as with instrumental causality and

aliquid potentie cognitive eam vitaliter immutando representare, et sic dicimus conceptum qui est naturalis similitudo alicuius rei proprie representare.

[64] On this problem of self-referentiality see S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 178-9, and E.J. Ashworth, 'Doctrine of Signs' (1990), 22.

[65] See Jorg A. Tellkamp, *Sinne, Gegenstände und Sensibilia: Zur Wahrnehmungslehre des Thomas von Aquin* (Leiden, 1999), 236-7.

[66] John Versor, *Super septem tractatus*, fol. a7r: *Vox non significativa est quae auditui nihil representat quod intelligitur, quia nihil representat praeter seipsam per modum signi. Licet bene representat seipsam per modum signi, non tamen bene representat seipsam per modum rei; sicut bu ba, quae voces nihil representant.*

[67] See above, note 60.

the Thomistic model of the significational force, similarity concerns an intrinsic property of a thing, too, while an emphasis on the purely semiotic relation concurs with the covenantal approach of Scotists and Nominalists.

The Augustinian inclusion of both words and sacraments into the notion of sign resulted thus in two similar models of the functioning of sacramental and linguistic items. The medieval expansion, however, of the notion of signs to concepts led to a problematization of this very starting point of the discussion, *i.e*. the proper wording of the Augustininan definition of a sign. In this sense, the definition's consequent application in different fields of late medieval thought ended up in its own invalidation. Yet, the different schools of thought of late medieval logic dealt differently with the definition's deficiencies. The Nominalists, who only had a problem to bring the definition into agreement with their understanding of concepts as signs, tried to find their way with Augustine, discussed the definition and pointed to its limited validity. One of their most common way to do so was to say that the Augustinian definition was valid for any sign except concepts.[68] The Thomists, however, whose conception of self-referentiality in any sign was fundamentally opposed to the Augustinian understanding, just started to ignore the Latin father's definition in their logical writings and replaced it by a definition they attributed to Cicero.[69]

The reception of Augustine's definition of a sign brought thus forth, at the end of the Middle Ages, two ways of handling its deficiencies: one was to put it aside, and the other was to restrict its validity. Obviously, this is rather close to what the Lutherans and Calvinists would do, even if there was only an implicit rejection of the definition by our Thomist authors, and not an explicit refusal as the Lutherans would present. It is thus time to finally turn back to these protestant authors and to see, if this parallel is just coincidental, or if there was more at stake.

3. Augustine's semiotics and the inner-protestant debates

In early protestant scholasticism, discussions of Augustine's definition took place, as initially has been shown, in logical and metaphysical writings. On the surface, the discussion's primary concern was thus philosophical and seems to have continued what we have had in late medieval logic. However,

[68] *E.g*. John Mair, *Summulae in collegio Montis acuti composite* (Paris, 1516), fol. 2ra, where the Augustinian definition only pertains to one of four different understandings of a sign. A similar example provides Domingo de Soto, *Summulae* (Salamanca, 1554), fol. 2vb. On this passage see S. Meier-Oeser, *Spur* (1997), 137 n. 90.

[69] See John Versor, *Super septem tractatus* (1495), fol. a6v: *Signum autem ut dicit Tullius est quod se primo offert sensui aliquid relinquens intellectui*. Magnus Hundt, *Compendium* (1501), fol. D1v uses this definition without any attribution. On the possible origins of this definition see I. Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace* (2004), 50.

when turning back to the Calvinist authors and reading how Timpler continued to defend the sensual perceptibility of signs, one suddenly gets from a semiotic question into a debate – on the Eucharist! Based on his understanding of sensible signs, Timpler concluded: 'It is therefore obvious, that those are in vehement error who claim the Eucharist to consist of a twofold sign, one external, namely bread and wine, and one internal, namely the body and blood of Christ.'[70] Apparently, in this inner-protestant debate, there was lurking behind an ostensibly purely logical controversy a theological discussion of the right understanding of the sacraments and the Eucharist in particular.

This commingling of theological and logical problems is comprehensible against the background of the medieval reception of Augustine's semiotics, which had, as we have seen, not only its logical afterlife, but was also received in the theology of sacraments. And this understanding survived the Reformation. It is true that, regarding medieval sacramental theology, Luther and his followers were relentless in criticizing the number, the practices, or the presumed efficacy of sacraments as they were conceived by Roman Catholics. They never questioned, however, the fundamental Augustinian conception of the sacraments as signs.[71] As a matter of fact, this basic definition was one of the rare points of accordance not only with the Roman Catholics, but among the different protestant parties as well. In many other aspects of their respective understanding of the sacraments, the differences between the two main branches of early Protestantism were fundamental – actually, their differences in that question were, in the late fifteen twenties and early fifteen thirties, the main reason for the separation of the Protestant movement into a Lutheran and a Reformed camp. While Luther, although rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation, still admitted Christ's physical appearance in the Eucharist and developed his doctrine of 'real presence', Zwingli, and later on the Calvinists, denied such an eventful dimension.[72] Hence for the Lutherans, the sacraments were signs in a twofold way, be it as a corporeal thing (*e.g.* the bread) that signified a celestial thing (the body of Christ), or as a conglomerate of terrestrial bread and the real present Christ that, as a whole, signified Gods promise of grace.[73]

[70] *Metaphysicae systema* III.4 (1613), 321: *Unde etiam patet, vehementer errare eos, qui in Eucharistia duplex signum esse statuunt, unum externum, nempe panem et vinum; alterum internum, nempe corpus et sanguinem Christi.*

[71] It is true that Luther criticized in his *De captivitate Babylonica* from 1520 the scholastic focus on the sacraments as signs (WA 6:518 and 533). But since he aimed to emphasize the promise contained in them, he necessarily came back on their semiotic nature and finally even excluded penitence from the list of acceptable sacraments since it lacked a visible sign (*ibid.* 572).

[72] See Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body. The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids MI, 2008) and Joachim von Soosten, 'Präsenz und Repräsentation. Die Marburger Unterscheidung', in *Die Gegenwart Jesu Christi im Abendmahl*, ed. Dietrich Korsch (Leipzig, 2005), 99-122.

[73] *E.g.* Balthasar Meisner, *Philosophia sobria* I.4.6 (Wittenberg, 1614), 1085: *Signum sacramentale duplex a nobis Theologis statuitur. Vel enim sumitur pro re terrestri, aut elemento visibili,*

For Zwingli and his followers, however, since the sacramental elements did not contain anything beyond themselves, they simply signified Gods salutary action in man.[74]

Yet, this reformed restriction of sacraments to mere signs is rather close to what Duns Scotus and the Nominalists said, who also denied the sacraments to have an intrinsic effect, but conceived of them as pure signs on whose application God alone produced the grace. The Lutheran position, on the other hand, with its emphasis on the eventful character of a sacrament, had its similarities with the late medieval Thomist approach – in protestant scholasticism, Lutheran theologians went as far as explicitly calling the sacraments instrumental causes of grace.[75] But while in the late Middle Ages the two theological positions were discussed as the *duae famosae opiniones* without leading to an insurmountable break between their defenders, the dissension was, in early Protestantism, at the very heart of the split-up into different denominations. There really was more at stake in this innerprotestant debate, and that is apparently why these Protestant authors started to expand the theological debate into questions that formerly were treated as purely logical or semiotic problems. Obviously, the split-up was so fundamental that it affected other disciplines as well.

The proper reasons for the Lutherans' rejection of the Augustinian definition are thus to be found in their sacramental theology. In fact, for them, Augustine's definition was problematic in a twofold way according to their double understanding of the semiotic value of a sacrament. One side of the problem concerned the well-known restriction to sensible things. When the conglomerate of bread and the real present Christ was said to signify as a whole Gods promise of grace, one crucial part of that sign, namely the real present Christ, was not sensible at all.[76] But this is only one side of the problem. Because, when,

quod rem coelestem significat, ut in veteri, exhibet, ut in Novo Testamento. Vel sumitur pro toto Sacramento, constante ex re terrena et coelesti, mystice unitis, et certo ritu dispensandis. Atque huius signi sacramentalis signatum est promissio gratiae.

[74] See already Zwingli's *De vera et falsa religione commentarius* 15, in *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1914), 3,761: *Coena dominica damus experimentum, quod morte Christi fidamus, qum gratulantes et laeti adsumus in eo coetu, qui domino gratias agit pro beneficio redemptionis, quod moriendo pro nobis liberaliter dedit.*

[75] Johannes Gerhard, *Loci theologici* 18.1, ed. E. Preuss (Berlin, 1866), 4,169: *De quocunque effectus praedicatur, illud est causa ejusdem vel principalis vel instrumentalis. Atqui de sacramentis praedicatur effectus regenerationis, mundationis, remissionis peccatorum et salutis etc. Ergo sunt ejusdem causa vel principalis, vel instrumentalis. Non principalis, quia hic honor soli Deo competet. Ergo instrumentalis.* See Hermann Kahl, *De subjecto et adiuncto* (Wittenberg, 1652), fol. A3v: *Sacramenta sunt signa exhibitiva, quia simul porrigunt id quod signant, utpote sunt efficacia organa regenerationis et gratiae divinae.*

[76] See, *e.g.*, Balthasar Meisner, *Philosophia sobria* I.4.6 (1614), 1087f.: *Ut autem aliquid signum sit μεταδοτικὸν vel exhibitivum, ad hoc non requiritur visibilitas aut sensibilitas. Quod enim tantum visibile est, id tantum corporeum est et terrenum, ideoque spiritualem gratiam conferre aut obsignare nequit. […] Quam ob causam nulla res visibilis et externa absque re invisibili et interna certo verbo addita, appellationem signi obsignantis et exhibentis meretur.*

on the other hand, the bread, taken alone, was said to signify the body of Christ, but Christ really was present *in* the Eucharist, then the sacrament signified itself and not *aliquid aliud*, something else, as the Augustinian definition required. The old problems of late medieval logic reappeared thus in Lutheran sacramental theology. And unsurprisingly, one finds a further parallel to the late medieval debate. Since, to keep the possibility to count the sacraments among the signs, Lutherans had to concede that there is not necessarily a real distinction between a signifier and its signified, so that – like the Thomists – they explicitly admitted the possibility that a sign can be self-referential.[77]

When Timpler, on the other hand, insisted – with the exception of the concepts – on the sensual perceptibility of any sign and on the real distinction between sign and signified, he also could easily resort to a set of arguments that already had been developed in late medieval semiotics; but even though he used these arguments in his metaphysics, he, as well, was not really looking for a philosophical, but rather for a theological point against the Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist.[78] His insistence on the Augustinian definition was thus motivated by his theological convictions, and the definition suited his purposes so well that the Lutherans, in turn, could not do otherwise but explicitly reject it.

4. Conclusion

In order to conclude this short survey, one may focus on the rather surprising continuities in the late medieval and early modern reception of Augustine's definition of a sign. The same aspects in his definition were conceived as problematic: its restriction of signs to sensible things, and the claim that a sign had to signify something else than itself. Interestingly enough, the respective handling of those problematic aspects was divided, in both late medieval and protestant scholasticism, into two comparable groups: the Thomists and Lutherans on the one side, and the Scotists, Nominalists and Calvinists on the other. The parallels between these groups pertain to semiotic problems such as the possibility of a sign's self-referentiality; they concern theological issues such as the question of sacramental causality; and they affect, last but not least, the treatment of the Augustinian definition itself. But while, in late medieval scholasticism, the

[77] Zwingli already reminded the problem of a real distinction between sign and signified in Luther's conception of sacraments, see *De vera et falsa religione* (1914), 18, 800. Among Lutherans, the problem is usually solved with recourse to a formal distinction, see Christoph Scheibler, *Metaphysica divina* (1637), 1:421f., and Adam Spengler, *Exercitationes metaphysicorum* 10.3.4 (Berlin, 1649), fol. B4r.

[78] Besides the passage cited above in note 68, see already his *Metaphysicae systema* III.4 (1613), 305: *[Non] vere dici potest signatum esse in signo. Errant igitur illi, qui in Eucharistia statuunt co[r]pus Christi vere et proprie vel localiter, vel alio modo esse in pane, et de eodem praedicari.*

logical and the theological reception of Augustine's semiotics took place on different tracks, the early protestant authors started to intermingle logics and theology. In order to ensure their theological doctrines, they started to develop their respective, denominationally customized logics.[79] Hence, in the context of these denominational logics, the controversial reception of Augustine's definition of a sign was a consequence more of sacramental theology than of an intrinsically semiotic discussion, and by the prominent approval or rejection of his definition, Augustine figured as those denominational logics' uncommon denominator.

[79] On these confessionalized logics see Gino Roncaglia, *Palaestra rationis. Discussioni su natura della copula e modalità nella filosofia 'scolastica' tedesca del XVII secolo* (Florence, 1996).